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A STRATEGY FOR PROMOTING VALUE ENGINEERING PROGRAMS

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ABSTRACT

Organizations need a publicity strategy for getting a new VE program off the ground or revitalizing an existing one. This paper presents a strategy for accomplishing this. The Function Analysis System Technique (FAST) is used to help define key elements in a successful publicity strategy. The paper describes how such elements can be implemented to help establish and sustain an active VE program.

A closer look at this problem statement reveals that it can apply to both new and existing VE programs. In the case of a new program there are many issues. Where do we start? How much can we spend? Who is our target audience? How do we measure results? Etc.

Existing programs have some of the same issues but also face other questions such as: Are we doing the right things? (training, publicity materials, exhibits, etc.) How effective are we? How do we get more participants? How do we keep current participants? Etc.

INTRODUCTION

VE has survived the test of time due to the ingenuity of its creator, Larry Miles, and the accomplishments of VE practitioners world-wide. However, it has not captured the attention it deserves. The trend to a "value added" market place and VE legislation in Government offers exciting opportunities.

Our own tool, FAST, can help us seize such opportunities. Using FAST, a team can identify the key ingredients in a successful VE publicity strategy. The FAST model can also focus the organization in what it wants out of VE and how it will get there. To illustrate the power of this approach, let us start with a generic problem statement:

How can we best establish and implement a VE publicity strategy that educates personnel, encourages the use of VE, and motivates the target market to increase its participation in the VE program?

These are not easy questions and can not be generally answered. Each organization must consider its situation. Who is the target market and what makes it tick? Moreover, each question could be FAST modeled for a deeper understanding of the issues. Despite these challenges, a FAST model of the suggested problem statement can give us some insight as to how to put together a good VE publicity strategy.

FAST MODEL

Using the problem statement, the following functions can be generated:

- Develop Publicity Strategy
- Educate Target Market
- Motivate Target Market
- Obtain New Participation
- Increase Current Participation

The FAST model in Figure 1. was developed by expanding on these functions.

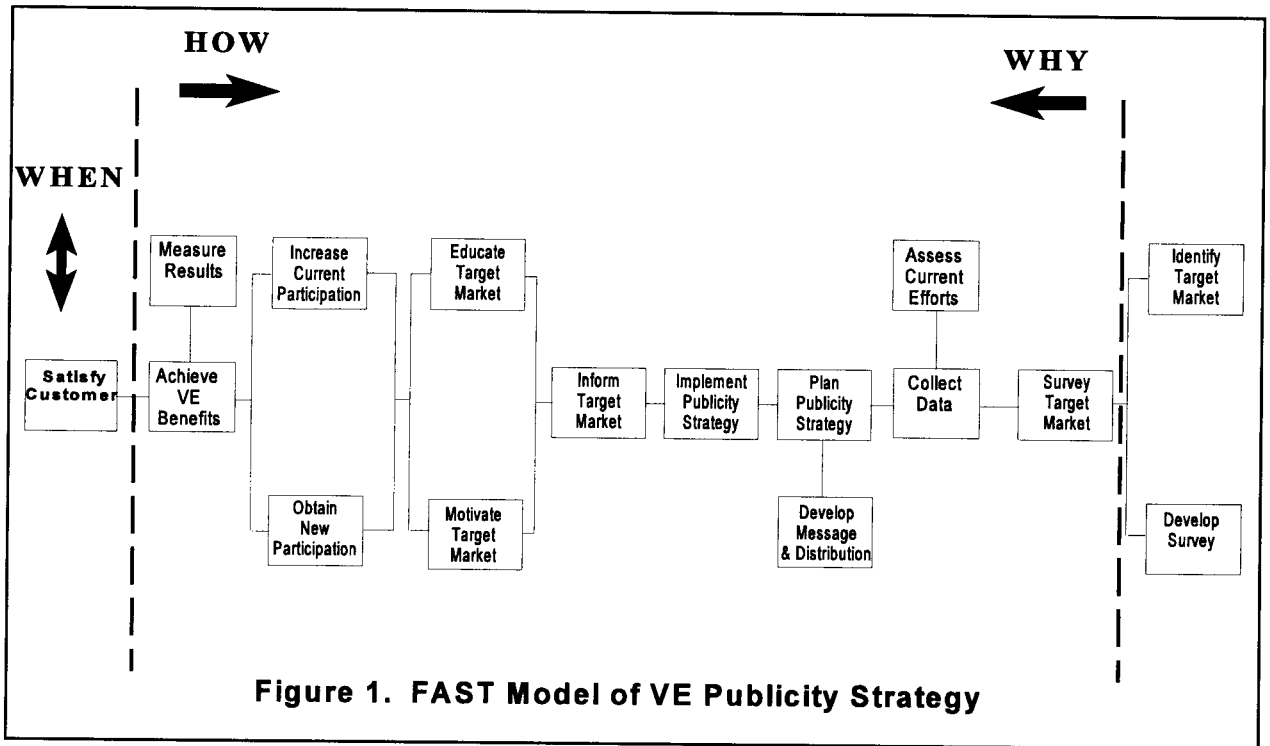


Figure 1. FAST Model of VE Publicity Strategy

Analysis of this FAST model leads to the following strategy elements:

- Assessment of Current Efforts
- Target Market
- Message and Distribution Method
- Measurements of Success

We will examine each of these areas in more detail.

ASSESSMENT OF CURRENT EFFORTS

The object of this element is to determine the strengths and weaknesses of past and current publicity initiatives. One can learn much from surveying publicity material users. This information can be gathered through questionnaires, interviews and other means.

Depending on how much effort has gone into publicizing the VE program, this could be a major undertaking. In the case of large organizations where there is a broad range of current and potential participants, one should seek to understand what works with whom.

A good place to start is to ask ourselves a question such as, "have we taken a shotgun approach by developing and disseminating materials which address

everybody, or have we targeted specific groups by putting out customized materials?" The answers should help us in planning the data gathering.

The following questions should be considered when developing a questionnaire or other data gathering device.

1. Who are we trying to target?
2. What image are we trying to convey with our publicity?
3. What message are we sending out?
4. How well is the message being understood?
5. What action are we trying to incite?
6. What benefits do we hope to gain?
7. How could we measure the effectiveness of our publicity?
8. What are better ways to get the message out?
9. What positive thoughts come to mind when the VE program is mentioned?
10. What negative thoughts come to mind when the VE program is mentioned?
11. What would happen if we ceased all VE program publicity activity?
12. How effective is our current training in getting new participants?
13. Is the current training improving the quality of our VE program?

TARGET MARKET

The target market, if not already identified, should become evident after data gathering. A good way to slice the market is to determine the level of VE awareness/ experience of current and potential participants. Again, data gathered to assess current efforts should give us some insight into the level of VE awareness/ experience.

Publicity materials can then be developed and distributed based on the section of the market they are intended for. For instance, an eye-catching, generic brochure about what VE has done for an organization will better serve those with little or no awareness. On the other hand, a brochure on unique VE applications and what training is available to hone VE skills will be more effective with practitioners.

An interesting market segment that can be sizable in large organizations is the practitioners of related areas (TQM, re-engineering, etc.). We are missing an opportunity to grow if we view them as our competition and not our colleagues. These individuals can be excellent VE practitioners due to their analytical background.

MESSAGE AND DISTRIBUTION METHOD

Once the current efforts have been assessed and the target market has been identified, the right message should be developed. This message needs to create the right image for the VE program. It should portray VE as a proven product and process improvement technique and not "just another cost reduction program."

Figure 2. Expands the FAST model in the message and distribution method area. This figure shows key functions that should happen "WHEN" we Inform Target Market. The set above deals with publicity distribution. We need to consider all cost effective means of getting the word out. The best publicity materials are of no service if they are not properly distributed. Some of the details include distribution guidelines, media (brochures, videos, exhibits, etc.) and schedules. Who the target market is and where it can be reached will influence these decisions.

The issue of creating a positive image is crucial due to its long term impact. For example, if we only publicize successes without explaining how they were achieved, we will not be too credible. Another trap is to overemphasize cost savings and not discuss other VE program benefits, i.e., improved performance, enhanced quality, etc.

The functions below "Inform Target Market" highlight important message features:

- Uniqueness of VE Methodology
- VE Benefits (beyond savings)
- Positive Image

To create a positive image we certainly need results. But that alone will not do it. The message needs to clearly convey the problem solving and creative benefits of VE. It needs to say how VE works and how it can significantly improve the organization.

A great way to reinforce the message is to reward the individuals responsible for the VE accomplishments and to publicize their successes. This publicity should produce two benefits; raise the level of interest in VE and motivate VE practitioners to do more. This alone would be an interesting area to study but it falls outside the scope of this discussion.

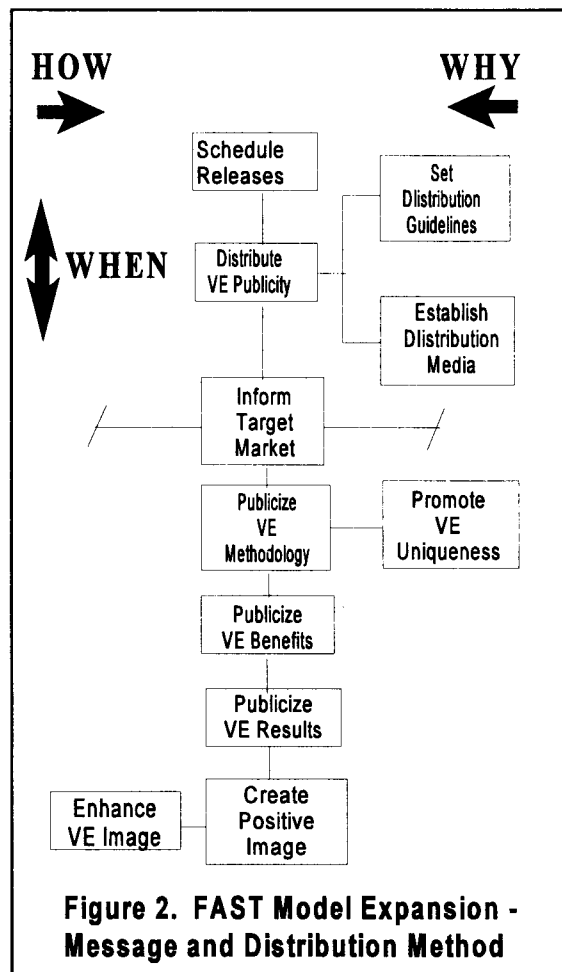
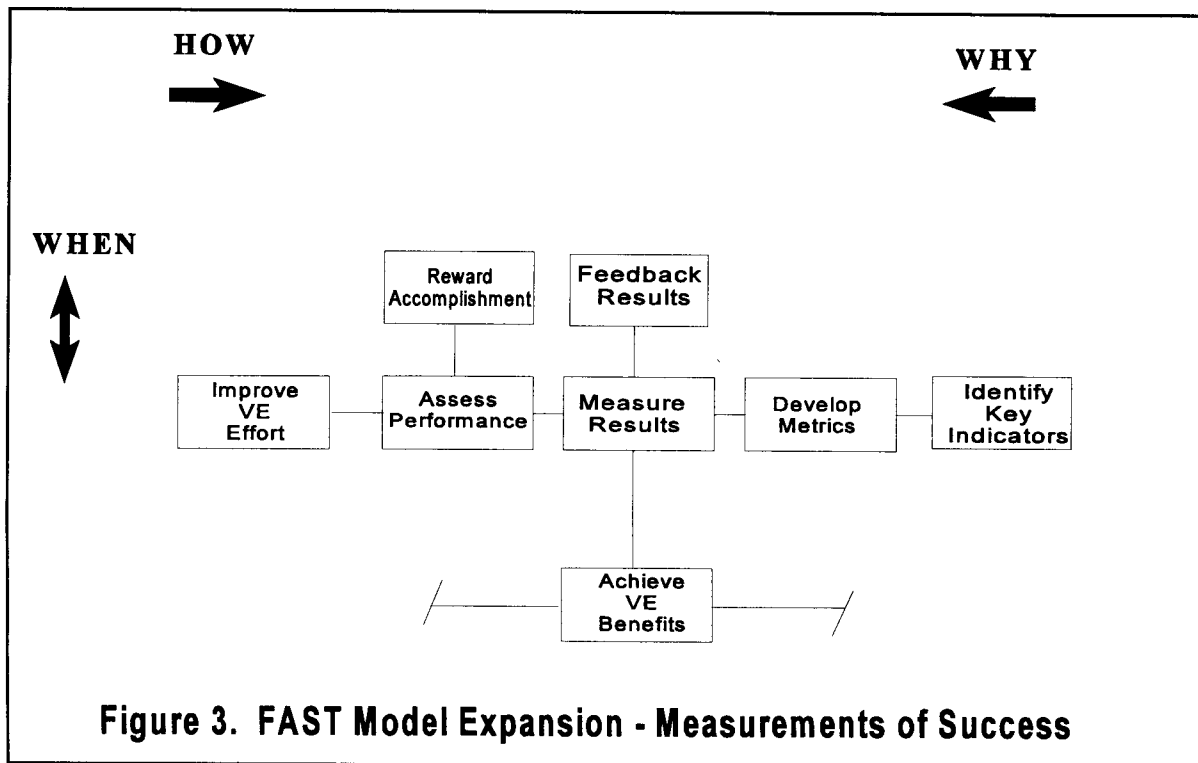


Figure 2. FAST Model Expansion - Message and Distribution Method



MEASUREMENTS OF SUCCESS

If we want to know how successful our VE publicity strategy is, we need to look beyond savings. The common practice in VE programs such as the Government's is to assign VE savings goals to organizations and to measure their performance against such goals.

While savings can tell us that there is VE activity, it does not tell the whole story. To know if we have a growing VE program, these are some of the questions we need to ask:

- Are we getting new participants?
- Is VE being applied in new areas?
- Do we have more people interested in VE training?
- Is VE receiving more attention in our programs?
- Has the quality of VE projects improved?
- Is management more supportive of VE?

Questions such as these should help in deciding how to measure the effectiveness of the VE publicity strategy. Some of the indicators that relate to these questions include:

- Number of VE studies conducted

- Number of VE projects received/ approved
- Number of people trained in VE
- Number of requests for VE information
- Number of new VE applications

If our metrics accurately measure the success of our VE publicity strategy, we will be armed with very useful information. Such information can help us to continuously improve our publicity efforts. This improvement process will affect our overall VE program.

As can be seen in Figure 3., we measure results so that we can assess VE program performance. This feedback, if accurate and meaningful, will help us identify areas that need improvement. When we assess performance we will also look for strengths in our program. When we find them, we need to reinforce them by rewarding accomplishment.

CONCLUSION

A good VE publicity strategy is essential in reaching a broad range of current and potential VE participants. The more we understand how VE fits in their background and work environment, the more effective we can be in obtaining their participation. I hope to have illustrated how FAST can help us reach that end.